

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

NO. 1773

A SERMON

suggested by the sudden death of H.R.H. the Duke of Albany.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears
for a little time, and then vanishes away.”*

James 4:14.

WHEN a prince dies they toll the great bell of the cathedral that the entire city may hear it, and that for miles around the tidings may spread. Swift messengers of the press bear the news through the length and breadth of the land, and all men's ears are made to tingle. A *royal* death is a national warning. A death in any of our families is a loud call to our own household, a call which I trust we hear. But a death in the royal family has a voice to the whole nation. It will be heard, it must be heard. In this great city the crowds who care not to come to the house of God, will nevertheless hear of this lamented death, and think of it, and speak of it each man to his fellow. Death is an orator whose solemn periods demand attention, especially when he preaches from the steps of the throne. “The Lord's voice cries unto the city,” let believers be quick to hear the call to humiliation, to awakening, and to prayer that the visitation may be overruled for great and lasting good.

A *sudden* death is an especially impressive warning. If men die of old age we regard it as coming in the common course of things, but when a young man is suddenly snatched away, then we understand that though the old must die, the young may die, and that no one among us may reckon upon any long day of life, since in a moment our sun may go down before it is yet noon. So falls the grass beneath the mower's scythe, so fades the leaf from the tree. In a moment our strength is turned to weakness, and our comeliness into corruption. Then, in accents as plain as they are terrible, the Lord says, “Because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

We have this week received fresh proof that death is impartial. As the Arab proverb has it, the black camel stops at every man's door. Sorrow has entered in at the windows of palaces, and even in the royal chamber there lies one dead. If, therefore, death is so impartial that he smites down the captains, let not the rank and file hope to escape. Death, which forces entrance to a prince's bedchamber, will not respect our cottage door. To us also in due time shall be brought the message, “The Master is come and calls for you.” My ear hears a voice crying aloud, “Set your house in order; for you shall die and not live.” Will not you hear it? Will any one of you refuse the voice which speaks from heaven? Death evidently pays no respect to character, age, or hopefulness. A man may addict himself to the service of his country, but his patriotism will not protect him. He may be surrounded with a wall of affection, but this will not screen him. He may have at command all the comforts of life, and yet life may ooze out before the physician is aware. He may be tenderly beloved by an affectionate mother, and his name may be engraved on the heart of the fondest of wives, but death has no regard to the love of women. “It is appointed unto men once to die.” There is no discharge in this war, we shall all march into this fight, and unless the Lord Himself shall speedily come and end the present dispensation, we shall each one fall upon this battlefield, for the shafts of death fly everywhere, and there is no armor for either back or breast by which his cruel darts may be turned aside. I would to God that all of us retained this truth in our memories. “Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.” We have a very clear conviction that others will die, but as to ourselves, we put far from us the evil day, and care not to dwell upon a subject which smells so unpleasantly of the morgue. Yes, we admit that we shall die, but not so soon as to make it a pressing matter, we imagine that we are not within measurable distance of the tomb. Even the oldest man gives himself a little longer lease, and when he

has passed his four-score years, we have seen him hugging life with as much tenacity as if he had just commenced it. Brethren, in this we are not wise, but death will not spare us because we avoid him. What is there about any one of us that we should fare better than the rest of our fellow men? We are in the same army, marching upon the same field, how should we escape where all others fall? Only two of our race, have gone into the better land without crossing the dark river of death—Enoch and Elijah, but no one among us will make a third.

Now, upon this matter we have nothing to say but what is commonplace, for garnish them as you may, graves are among the most common of common things. Yet a solemn reflection upon the shortness of life, and the certainty of death, may prove to be important and even invaluable, if it is allowed to penetrate our hearts and influence our lives. History tells us of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who was sitting at a banquet as thoughtless and careless as any of the revelers, when suddenly one at the table bowed his head and died. Waldo was startled into thought, and went home to seek his God. He searched the Scriptures, and according to some, became a great helper, if not the second founder, of the Waldensian church, which in the Alpine valleys kept the lamp of the gospel burning when all around was veiled in night. A whole church of God was thus strengthened and perpetuated by the hallowed influence of death upon a single mind. I suppose it is also true that Luther in his younger days, walking with his friend Alexis, saw him struck to the ground by a flash of lightning, and became from that day on prepared in heart for that deep work of grace through which he learned the doctrine of justification by faith, and rose to be the liberator of Europe from Papal bondage. How much every way, we owe to this weighty subject! Among the earnest, the prayerful, the holy, many must acknowledge that the vaults of death have brought them spiritual health. Men have been helped to live by remembering that they must die, yes, some men knew nothing of the highest form of life till death awakened them from their deadly slumbers. I hope that God's Spirit may this morning impress many of you with these reflections, and lead you to the cross of Christ by the way of this *memento mori*. May a prince's death awaken many of you to life. He being dead now speaks to you. From yonder sunny shores he reminds you of the valley of death which you must shortly traverse.

With an intense desire for our spiritual profit I shall speak upon our text in two ways, first let us consider *the truth in the text*, and secondly, *the lessons in that truth*.

I. We commence with THE TRUTH IN THE TEXT, upon which we have already touched. The text begins by reminding us that we have no foresight, "Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us memory that we may look backward, and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection, and repentance, but God has given us no eyes with which to pry into the future. He unveils the past to our penitence, but He veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them, and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so we may faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke. It is good also that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time for their arrival. Great prosperity may await you, and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it, and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like birdlime, and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below and prevent our soaring towards heaven. If then we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us we might become worldlier and more earthbound than we are. None of us should desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us; we are glad that it should have less, and therefore we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown.

No, we cannot see far, and those who act as if they could see into coming days behave most foolishly. Hear these people whom James describes, they boast most wretchedly, they will go into the city, they are sure they will, what is to hinder them? "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city"—they have plenty of time, and can make a selection according to their pleasure, they can go where they like, and when they like. They see themselves with prophetic glance entering in at the city gate, and they are fully assured that they shall "continue there a year." Of course, a year is a small matter; if they please they will stay longer. They allot themselves a lease for three, seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, at discretion, at least they talk as if they could do so. They are going into the city to "buy and sell," they are sure

of that too. Of course they will not be laid up with sickness, they do not fear that accident or disease will keep them away from market, or hinder the active transacting of their business. No, they are going to buy and sell, and such is their confidence in their own superior abilities that they are sure to make a profit. The markets cannot fall below the price which they have fixed in their own minds, neither will they make bad debts, nor incur other losses, for they have decided that they will “get gain.” Up to now they have been self-made men, and they mean to go on making themselves, until they put the finishing stroke by adding a few more thousands. They have visions of going on to fortune. Ah, you prophets, you are going to your graves! This is a sure oracle. The tomb will be your only patrimony, and the shroud your sole possession. Let none of us talk of what we resolve to do at some future date. Look well to the present, for that is all the time we can be sure of, and there may be little enough of that. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave where you go.” Thus said the wise man, let wise men take heed to his counsel.

The apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed foresight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another day. You have come close up to the end of March, but if you reckon upon what you will do upon the first of April, you may find by the event that you are a fool. You may get to the last day of the year, but if you reckon on a new year, you may be giving new proof of your ignorance. Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James puts the matter strongly when he asks, “What is your life?” You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it?

The text divides itself into an emphatic question, “What is your life?” and an instructive answer, “It is even vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.”

First, I say, we have here *an emphatic question*. He asks, “What is your life?” For solidity, for stability, what is it? What is there in it? Is it not composed of such stuff as dreams are made of? The breath in your nostrils is not more unsubstantial than is your life. There, breathe it out! On such a morning as this you see your breath, but it is only in your sight for a moment, and then it vanishes away. Your own breath is a fair picture of the flimsy, airy thing which men call life. What is your life? What is it for continuance? Some things last awhile, and run down for centuries, but what is your life? Even garments bear some little wear and tear, but what is your life? A delicate texture, no cobweb is a tenth as frail. It will fail before a touch, a breath. Justinian, an emperor of Rome, died by going into a room which had been newly painted, Adrian, a pope, was strangled by a fly, a consul struck his foot against his own threshold, and his foot mortified, so that he died thereby. There are a thousand gates to death, and though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape seed, killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all. So unstable is our life that the Apostle says, “What is it?” So frail, so fragile is it that he does not call it a flower of the field, or the snuff of a candle, but asks, “What is our life?” It is as if he had said—“Is it anything? Is it not a near approach to nothing?”

Have you ever noticed how David answers this question in the thirty-ninth Psalm? He says in the fifth verse of that Psalm that *man is vanity*. What is vanity? It is nothing in reality, it is merely the pretense of something; it is an idle dream, an empty conceit, a delusion, make-believe. Such is man. But David says more than that, he declares that *every man is vanity*. Princes, kings, philosophers, the strongest, the healthiest, the ablest, the most virtuous—every man is vanity. Among the millions of mankind none rises above this dreary state of nothingness. He says more than that. He writes—*every man at his best state is vanity*, when he is in the prime and glory of his life, when he is most healthy and vigorous, when his eyes are clearest, and his muscles are firmest, he is still no better than sheer vanity. David goes even further, for he thus speaks—“*Every man at his best state is altogether vanity*,” that is, he is nothing but vanity; there is nothing more enduring about him. He is gone with a puff. He spends his years as a tale that is told. Do not overlook one more emphatic word which David sets in the forefront of the sentence, “*Verily*,” as if he were quite sure of it, and could not tolerate a question upon the subject—“*Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity*.”

Have you ever observed how Job, when he speaks of our life, sets us a sign in each of the three elements whereon and wherein we dwell? See his ninth chapter, at the twenty-fifth verse. He says, “My days are swifter than a courier.” Here is an emblem upon the land. Oriental kings employed swift-footed

runners and horses and camels, and these to the Oriental imagination were the very *beau ideal* of speed. Even we, before the days of electricity, knew of nothing faster than the royal mail. Job therefore well says, "My days are swifter than a courier." Then he bids us look to sea, for he says, "They are passed away as the swift ships." Ships which are built for speed seem to fly as on wings when they spread their sails to a favoring wind. We ought not to view ships at sea without remembering the brevity of our days. But lest we should still forget, the patriarch further likens his days to "the eagle that hastens to the prey." As the vulture spies from a distance the carcass of a camel, and descends upon it with hasty swoop, so our life hastens to descend. Thus earth, sea, and air all remind us of the speed at which life flies towards its end.

St. Augustine used to say he did not know whether to call it a dying life or a living death, and I leave you the choice between those two expressions. This is certainly a dying life; its march is marked by graves. Nothing but a continuous miracle keeps any one of us from the sepulcher. Were omnipotence to stay its power but for a moment, earth would return to earth, and ashes to ashes. It is a dying life, and equally true is it that it is a living death. We are always dying. Every beating pulse we count leaves the number less. The more years we count in our life, the fewer remain in which we shall behold the light of day. While we are sitting still in this house, the earth is revolving round the sun, and bearing us all through space at an amazing rate. We are all moving, and yet we do not perceive it, even so while you are listening to this sermon you are all being borne onward towards eternity at lightning speed. As though we were laid in the bosom of some mighty angel, and he with outstretched wings darted along like a flame of fire, we are always urging our onward way. Though we dream that we are at a stop, yet we never rest for an instant. The stream is bearing us onward, we are nearing the waterfall. We must always obey the mandate—"Onward, onward, onward." From childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to grey old age we march onward in serried ranks from which no man can retire. We tarry not even when we sleep, we are continually moving forward like the waters of yonder river, on whose banks we find a habitation. What, then, is our life? That is a question which remains to a large degree unanswered and unanswerable.

Yet our text affords us what is in some aspects, *an instructive answer*. It does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is like. "*It is even a vapor.*" James compares our life you see, to a very subtle, unsubstantial, flimsy thing—a vapor. If you live upon a high hill, from which you can look down upon a stretch of country, you see in the early morning a mist covering all the valleys. It is singular to mark the tops of the great elms appearing above it, like islands in a sea of cloud with perhaps here and there a church spire rising like a sharp pyramid from the waste of mist. In a little time you look from the same window, and the vapor has all vanished. It was so thin, so fine, so much like gossamer, that a breath of wind has scattered it, or perhaps the sun has drawn it aloft, at any rate, not a trace of that all-encompassing vapor remains. Such is your life. Or you have marked a cloud in the western sky, illuminated with those marvelous lights which glowed during those extraordinary sunsets, the like of which none of our fathers had seen. You looked at the jeweled mass, it shone in the perfection of beauty, and all the colors of the rainbow were blended in its hues. In another instant, lo, it was not, it was gone past all recall. Such is your life. This morning, as we came here, we saw our breath, it was before our eyes for an instant, and soon it had gone. Such is the picture which James presents to us. "What is your life? It is even a vapor."

He proceeds to explain his own symbol in a sentence which is full of meaning. "It is even a vapor *that appears*." Notice that. He does not speak of it as a substance, having a true existence, but says that it "*appears*." Vapor is so ethereal, phantom-like, and unreal, that it may rather be said to appear than to exist. If you could reach yon fleecy cloud, you would scarcely know that you had entered it, for it would possibly appear to be the thinnest of mist. The vapor which steams from your mouth, how light, how airy, it is next door to nothing, it only "appears." And such is this life—a dream, a vain show, an apparition of the night. Half our joys and sorrows are but the pretense of joy and the shadow of sorrow, and the most of things through which we travel are not what they seem. We ought to know this in a practical way, and set less store by the thing which are seen, which are temporal. This life "appears"—that is all.

Further the apostle says it "*appears for a little time*." It is only a very little while that a man lives at the longest. Compare a man's life with that of a tree. There is so striking a contrast between our present short life and that of a cedar, or an oak, that to set forth the longer life of saints in the millennial age the

Lord says, "As the days of a tree are the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." In that happy age men shall flourish long as the trees of the forest, but now a man standing beneath an oak is a mere infant compared with the branches which overshadow him. A hundred years ago that oak seemed every way as venerable as it does today, whereas the man was then unthought of by his grandfather. Compare our life with the existence of this world. I mean not the present state of the earth as fitted up for man, but I allude to those unknown ages which intervened between the present arrangement and that beginning wherein God created the heavens and the earth. The long eras of fire and water, the reigns of fishes and reptiles, the periods of tropical heat and polar ice, make one think of man as a thing of yesterday. Then contrast our life with the being of the eternal Lord, and what is man—man when most venerable with years? A Methuselah, what is he? He is but an insect born in the morning's sunbeam, sporting in the noontide ray, and dead when the dews begin to fall. He appears for a little while.

The parallel is further consummated by the apostle's adding, "*And then vanishes away.*" The cloud is gone from the mountain. Where is it? It has vanished away. No trace of it is left, neither can you recall it. We too shall soon be gone, gone as a dream when one awakens. With the most of us our memory will be short. Many leave us concerning whom it would be a pity that they should be remembered, while many fail to live for others, and therefore their fellows speedily forget them. Amid the crowded cemetery a single grave is lost, amid ten thousand deaths no one departure can long abide in human memory. As far as this world is concerned we all shall by and by vanish away. Then shall our near companion say of us—

*"One morn I missed him on the accustomed hill,
Along the heath, and near his favorite tree;
Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."*

The air has felt the passing bell, and now the stars look down upon a stone on which is written in large letters, "HERE HE LIES!" Or the dews shall wet a grass-grown mound, girt about with brambles, on which a few wild flowers have sprung up spontaneously to show how life shall yet triumph over death. Children may bear our name, and yet a fourth generation shall quite forget that we ever sojourned in this region. Such is our life—"a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." This is the truth, you know it, but I cannot impress it upon your hearts as it ought to be impressed, therefore I invite you to join me in the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

II. Secondly, let us now learn THE LESSONS WHICH LIE WITHIN THIS TRUTH. May we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the same.

First, if this life is unsubstantial as a vapor—and nobody can deny the fact—let us regard it as such, and let us seek for something substantial elsewhere—

*"This world's a dream, an empty show;
But the great world to which I go
Has joys substantial and sincere—
When shall I wake and find me there?"*

It may be well to make the best of both worlds, but of this poor world nothing can be made unless it is viewed in the light of another. This is a poor withering life at the best, for we all fade as a leaf. Unless we purposely live with a view to the next world, we cannot make much out of our present existence. Such cast clouds and rotten rags as this poor present world of time and sense, can never be made up into an array in which a man would care to robe himself. At the same time, do not be frightened at the unhandsome form in which this life at times appears, it is after all but a vapor, and who will be alarmed at it? Do not be overjoyed as he was who hoped to embrace a goddess, and was deceived by a cloud, it is after all but a semblance, its sorrows are scarcely worth a tear, nor do its joys deserve a smile. Vanity and vapor are things which wise men set small store by. Children may be pleased with the bubbles which they blow by the aid of an old pipe and a piece of soap, but as for men who have put away childish things, they ought not to be greatly moved by the things of this life, for they are but bubbles of less brilliance and less substance than those which delight the child. "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity." Let the lower lights burn dimly before your eyes, they are mere sparks and they are soon quenched. Let us grip the eternal, and sit loose by the temporal. The jewels of eternity will glitter in our

crowns when all things pass away, but the trifles of this life are as the flowers which children pluck in the meadows, which wither in their hands before they can carry them home.

In this place I suggest as your prayer that stanza of the poet, in which he addresses the Well-beloved thus—

*“Show me Your face—
My faith and love
Shall henceforth fixed be,
And nothing here have power to move
My soul’s serenity.
My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
And all I feel and see
Illusive, visionary—
You, the one reality.”*

Next; is life most uncertain? We know it is; no one attempts to deny it. It is certain that life will come to an end, but it is most uncertain when it will come to that end. Is it so uncertain? Then let us not delay. I would to God I could whisper this wisdom into every procrastinator’s ear. Why do you halt and hesitate? If you are desirous to be saved from the wrath to come, why do you put it off till a tomorrow which may never come? Will you delay repenting, and die impenitent? Will you delay faith, and perish as an unbeliever? Will you keep back from mercy and pardon, and refuse the free grace of God? I pray you do not, for if you delay another day, it may be you will be in the land where hope can never come to you. Think of your peril, O you ungodly men! Within an hour you may be at the judgment seat of God, or in the pit of hell. Nothing keeps you where there is hope except a thread so fine as to be invisible, and so easily broken that none but a madman would trust his soul’s destiny upon it. Awake, I pray you! Since death is hastening, hasten yourself until you have found a refuge in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and are safe in the arms of Jesus. Since life is so uncertain, oh, hasten Christian, to serve your God while the opportunity is given you. Be diligent today to do those works which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do. You will soon be where you can no more give alms to the poor, nor instruct the ignorant, nor visit the fatherless and the widow. You shall have no opportunities for speaking to men about their souls, or winning them for Christ, when once this shadowy life has vanished away. How earnest every worker ought to be to do his work well while he has the opportunity! I have charged myself again and again—I would to God the charge had been more effectual—to preach—

*“As though I never might preach again,
A dying man to dying men.”*

I am persuaded that if we were in possession of all the wisdom that grace will give us, we should do everything for the good of men most speedily, with deep prayerfulness, with true spiritual life, and with an entire dependence upon the Spirit of God for the blessing of it. Come, my brothers and sisters, what you do, do quickly. If you wish to honor your Lord while you are here, and win jewels for His crown, up and at it, for the day is far spent. You cannot afford to waste a moment, for you have much to do, and very little time to do it in. Help us, O Spirit of the Lord!

Is life so short? Does it only appear for a little time, and then vanish away? Then let us put all we can into it. If life is short, it is wisdom to have no fallows, but to sow every foot of ground while we can. It will be prudent to pack our little space as full as possible. Somebody said the other day of our dear friend Mr. Moody, that he was the only man who could pronounce “Jerusalem” in two syllables. It shows the activity of the man that he can speak as much in two syllables as other people can say in four. He is always at it, working for his Master double tides, rowing with both hands. Some speakers are long in delivering short sense, instead of saying much in little, they say little in much. Oh, for someone to teach them to say “Jerusalem” in two syllables!

Let us put plenty of life into our existence, plenty of work into our life, plenty of heart into our work, and plenty of warmth into our heart. Oh, may God give us to live while we live! May we not only live but be all alive.

Is life so short? Then do not let us make any very great provision for it. I have heard of certain people who are so imprudent that they never lay by anything for a rainy day, to whom I would say, “Go to the ant, you sluggard, consider her ways and be wise, which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.” It would be a poverty-stricken world

if all followed the example of improvidence which is set by certain spiritual blunderers. There is a thriftiness which we all ought to exercise, but there is no justification for laying up treasure which will never be used! Ants do not store up grain for the sake of storing; they do but divide over the whole year the harvest of a month. To hoard up endless gold is a species of insanity. If I were going a day's voyage, I would not wish to take with me enough biscuit and salt beef to last for three years, it would only cumber the boat. One walking stick is an admirable help, as I often find, but to carry a bundle of them when going on a journey would be a superfluity of absurdity. Alas, how many load themselves as if life's journey would last a thousand years at the least! Some men have amassed hundreds of thousands of pounds, when are they going to enjoy their wealth? They are getting more and more, and this occupies all their time, they are so busy cooking that they never have time to dine, they are so taken up with filling the wardrobe that they are all in rags. We do not need a ton weight of candles if we are only going to sit up for a few minutes. Let us be wise enough to suit the supply to the need.

Is time so short? Then do not let us fret about its troubles and discomforts. A man is on a journey, and puts up at an inn, and when he is fairly in the hostelry, he perceives that it is a poor place, with scant food and a hard bed. "Well, well," he says, "I am off the first thing tomorrow morning, and so it does not matter." This world is an inn and if there are certain discomforts in it, let us remember that we are not tenants for years, but only guests for a day. Let us make the best we can of the temporary accommodation which this poor shanty of a world affords. Our life is removed as a shepherd's tent, which was a hovel in which the shepherds watched their sheep. A shepherd who has to watch the sheep for a short time does not set to work to build a granite palace, or a brick house, he is satisfied with a reed hut, and does not complain of its scant space and slender strength. So let it be with us. Let us sing together—

*"The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."*

Must life vanish away? We know it must. What then? That vanishing is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Dear friends, may I recommend you to remember that death is the end of this life? Do not leave this life to be raveled out at the end. I would like to have a well-hemmed life, with a finish about it. I would like to have my life enclosed with a fence of completeness. Too many leave life's business in such a way that they leave endless trouble for their families, lawyers devour their substance, and their children are impoverished. See that your will is made, your debts paid, your charities distributed, and all your affairs are arranged. Set your house in order, it is your duty as a citizen; it is your higher duty as a Christian. Do all that you would like to have done, if you knew you would die tomorrow. I like Mr. Whitefield's order, for he could not go to bed comfortably if his gloves were not in his hat ready for the morning. He felt that he could not tell when he would be called away, but he wished to have everything in its place whenever the summons should come.

Must this life vanish away? Then remember it is the beginning of another. The present life melts into the life to come. What kind of life, will that other be? Do you not think that if it is to be a glorious life it ought to commence here? Who would like to enter heaven, could it be possible, and feel compelled to say, "I cannot join in the music, for I do not know the tune; I cannot take up the hymn, for I know nothing of the song. I cannot glorify God, for I never did so while below. I cannot adore the Lamb, for I never trusted in Him while I was on earth." You must learn the music here, or you will never sing in the choirs of heaven. Oh, that this might awaken some of you! By the memory that this life must vanish away, may you be led to seek that eternal life which will abide in its excellence world without end.

And is death quite sure to come to me? Then, as I cannot avoid it, let me face it. If there were a way of avoiding it, I might postpone all consideration of it, but since I must meet it, let me know what I am doing, let me get ready for the inevitable, maybe it will become desirable. The thought of death will be one of two things to us, it will be a ghost to haunt us if we remain out of Christ, un-reconciled to God, and un-renewed in heart. To Godless and Christless persons, death will be the king of terrors in prospect and in reality. Ungodly men cannot bear to think of being called away. This morning they feel very uncomfortable while I am expounding upon this troublesome subject. I hope they will not soon recover their composure, but will remain uncomfortable till they yield to divine love, and trust in the living Savior. Death is an awful thing to those who have their all in this world. If they could but live here forever, they would be at peace, but it cannot be so. God will not give men immortality in this life to spend in disregarding Him. They must die. They may put Christ far from them, but they cannot put death far from

them; they may avoid the cross, but they cannot avoid the grave. The ungodly man frowns upon death because death frowns upon him. Death is the skeleton in his closet, it is the ghost at the foot of his bed, and it is the canker of his fairest joy. I would not like to be in such a position. Count me down all the red gold that could buy this round world, yet would I not accept it if I must live in fear of death.

But death will become another thing to you if you are renewed in heart. To the Christian it is an angel beckoning him onward and upward. It is not worthwhile to live on earth if this life were not to be crowned by death. I mean by leaving this world to go unto the Father. It is the supreme delight of the man who runs the race that is set before him that that course concludes with the winning post, and so comes to an end. We are not of those who voyage the sea of this life for the sake of it. We ask not to forever sail over this rough ocean, we long for land. It is our delight to think of the port ahead, our joy to see the snow-white cliffs of our heavenly Albion. We do not desire to live here always. Why should we? Banished from our God, liable to sin, subject to temptation, vexed with infirmities, struggling with corruptions, O Lord, what do we wait for?—

*“Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge
That sets my longing soul at large,
Takes off my chains, breaks up my cell,
And gives me with my God to dwell!”*

Believers have everything to gain by dying. “To die is gain.” We shall lose nothing which will be a loss to us. If one should take from us a jewel, but should give us another a thousand times its value, we should not regret the exchange. We lose this life, let it be such a jewel as you like, but we win the life to come, which is infinitely more precious. Beloved, instead of fearing death, we should be willing rather to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Why should we be unwilling to be glorified? Our departing day is our marriage day. Oh, that the bells would ring it in! It is our home-coming from the school where we have been in training here below. Why are the minutes so slow, the years so long? Let the holidays, the holy days, come soon, when we shall be at home in the Father’s house! “It does not yet appear what we shall be,” but it very soon will appear, and it will be no mere appearing—it will be real joy and lasting pleasure, solid, substantial, eternal, like the God who has prepared it for us from of old. It is a blessed thing to be able to go through the world thanking God for this life, but blessing Him yet more that it will land us at His right hand. Death is thus stripped of all dread; the curse is turned into a blessing. At the thought of it I feel ready to join in that rough but sweet verse—

*“Since Jesus is mine, I’ll not fear undressing,
But gladly take off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through death led the way.”*

God grant us so to live and die that we may live to die no more, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 39, JAMES 4:11-17.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—90, 823, 39.**

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